The Color of Friendship

The Color of Friendship is a 2000 television film based on actual events about the friendship between two girls; Mahree & Piper, one from the United States and the other from apartheid South Africa, who learn about tolerance and friendship.[2] The film was directed by Kevin Hooks, based on a script by Paris Qualles, and stars Lindsey Haun and Shadia Simmons.

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Plot

In 1977, Piper Dellums (Shadia Simmons) is a black girl who lives in Washington, D.C. with her father, Congressman Ron Dellums (Carl Lumbly), an outspoken opponent of the South African apartheid system and the oppression of black South Africans, her mother Roscoe Dellums (Penny Johnson), and two younger twin brothers, Brandon (Anthony Burnett) and Erik (Travis Davis). Piper, who has been taking an interest in the different nations of Africa, begs her parents to host an African exchange student.

Meanwhile, in South Africa, Mahree Bok (Lindsey Haun) is a white South African who lives in a manor house with her parents and little brother. They comfortably benefit from the system of apartheid without questioning its morality; Mahree's father, Pieter Bok, is a South African policeman who cannot hide his joy when Steve Biko (a black South African man fighting against apartheid) has just been captured. They also have a black maid, Flora (Melanie Nicholls-King), whom Mahree, in her racial blindness, considers her best friend, not realizing that Flora is not satisfied with her life under apartheid. However, Mahree's observation is not entirely wrong, as Flora is a kindly woman who is indeed friendly with the Bok children, believing that gentleness and persuasion work better than agitation. Flora tells Mahree that when she was a little girl she would observe the weaver bird, which has many different styles of plumage, and its communal nest-building, which is

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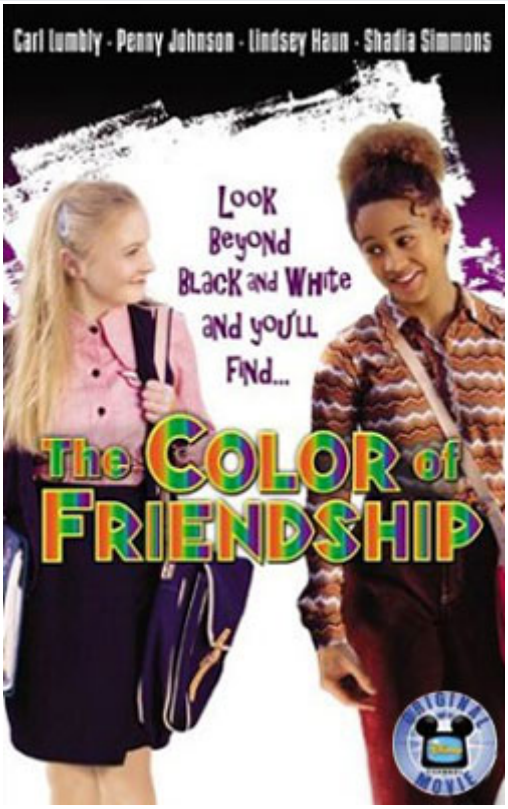
Carl Lumbly · Penny Johnson · Lindsey Haun · Shadia Simmons
Look Beyond Black and White and you'll Find...
The COLOR of FRIENDSHIP

VHS cover

Written by	Paris Qualles
Directed by	Kevin Hooks
Starring	Carl Lumbly Penny Johnson Lindsey Haun Shadia Simmons
Theme music composer	Stanley Clarke[1]
Country of origin	United States Canada
Original language(s)	English
Production	
Executive producer(s)	Alan Sacks[1]
Producer(s)	Kevin Hooks Christopher Morgan[1]

used as a metaphor for the possibility of racial harmony that Mahree does not understand at the time. Mahree also asks her parents for permission to study in America, which is granted by her father, who believes she will either get homesick or realize that America is not a paradise. However, Mahree is slightly aware of some of the injustices of her society, as a black busboy gets slugged for spilling a tray, which she finds revolting.

Both Mahree and Piper have misconstrued notions about each other's countries: Mahree does not think that there are black politicians, only knowing the patriarch of her host family is "Congressman Dellums", and although Piper is expecting a South African exchange student, she does not realize there are white residents.

Cinematography	David Herrington[1]
Editor(s)	Richard Nord[1]
Running time	87 minutes
Production company(s)	Alan Sacks Productions[1]
Distributor	Disney-ABC Domestic Television
Release	
Original network	Disney Channel
Original release	February 5, 2000

Their assumptions are not corrected until Piper and her mother meet Mahree at the airport and bring her home. Piper is bitterly disappointed. Mahree reacts with horror bordering on panic when confronted with this new situation, as does Ron. Piper goes to his office where he is meeting with several black Congressmen, and they all look surprised to see that he will be hosting a white South African. Once Mahree gets back to the Dellums' house, she locks herself in Piper's bedroom and refuses to come out.

Eventually, Piper picks the lock on the door to bring Mahree some fries and a chocolate shake. Mahree is standoffish, and Piper, upset by her attitude, tells Mahree how disappointed she is in her. Stunned by this, Mahree sees how rude she's been, and agrees to stay and try to make this work. Roscoe tries to play peacemaker, chalking up Mahree's reaction to misunderstanding and culture shock, while telling Ron and Piper they have been judgmental as well. Everyone tries to make this work out.

During Mahree's stay, she and the Dellums family grow close. Mahree sees people of different races getting along and realizes how much she and Piper have in common. The two become good friends and Mahree also begins to see her host family as individuals and learns to live among them day to day. Gradually, she develops a better understanding of what life under apartheid must be like for black South Africans.

When Steve Biko dies under suspicious circumstances in the custody of South African police, there are mass protests around the world, including at the South African embassy in Washington, D.C. In the wake of these protests, South African embassy diplomats arrive at the Dellums' house and take Mahree to the embassy, intending to send her back to South Africa.

In response, Ron goes to the South African embassy. After he threatens to tell the press that the embassy kidnapped Mahree from her host family, the embassy releases Mahree. Mahree returns to the Dellumses without fully understanding what happened to her and why.

When Mahree returns to the Dellums' house, she makes a cold offhand comment about Biko's death. Outraged, Piper shouts at her for being blind to the racial struggle happening in South Africa. Hurt, Mahree runs from the house. At first, it seems that their friendship is over; but soon Ron steps in to bridge the gap between the girls. He tells Mahree that the United States had a long, hard history of trying to overcome problems, which is what South Africa is doing now, and she finally fully grasps what the liberation fighters in South Africa stand for. She and Piper reconcile.

Soon, Mahree leaves the United States, now a very different person. When she returns home, the first person she greets is Flora. Secretly, Mahree shows her an ANC flag sewn inside her coat, signifying her decision to side with the black liberation movement. Flora is touched and pleased.

An epilogue-like scene at the end of the movie shows Mahree with the Dellumses at an African pride event back in America. Ron Dellums delivers a speech that includes the weaver-bird story, as told to him by "a new friend from South Africa."

Cast

- Carl Lumbly as Congressman Ron Dellums
- Penny Johnson as Roscoe Dellums
- Lindsey Haun as Mahree Bok
- Shadia Simmons as Piper Dellums
- Anthony Burnett as Brandy Dellums
- Travis Davis as Erik Dellums
- Melanie Nicholls-King as Flora
- Susan Danford as Merle Bok
- Stephen Jennings as Pieter Bok
- Michael Kanev as Rian Bok
- Ahmad Stoner as Daniel
- Ryan Cooley as Billy
- Erik Dellums as Oliver

Production

The Color of Friendship was written by Paris Qualles and directed by Kevin Hooks.[1] The film is based on two separate instances in which the Dellums family hosted a white South African teenage girl as an exchange student. Both instances were combined into a single story for the film.[3][4] Filming took place in Canada,[1] and was underway in Toronto during September 1999.[5] The film's production designer was Arthur W. Herriot.[1]

Release

The Color of Friendship premiered on Disney Channel on February 5, 2000, during Black History Month.[1][3][6] The film was released on VHS on January 8, 2002.[7]

Reception

Lynne Heffley of *Los Angeles Times* praised the cast and called the film "surprisingly compelling", and stated that while it is "frequently predictable", it "delves unexpectedly deeper, too."[8] David Kronke of *Los Angeles Daily News* noted that the film did an "admirably handy job" of educating children about apartheid, and called it a "thoughtful, entertaining family film that tackles its issues matter-of-factly and directly".[9] Ramin Zahed of *Variety* praised the cast and noted the "smart usage of '70s songs" as well as Herriot's "picture-perfect production design."[1]

Scott Hetrick of the *Sun-Sentinel* called the film "entertaining and enlightening," stating that it had a "terrific story that is wonderfully told and thoroughly fulfilling."[4] *The Seattle Times* wrote that the film "breaks the nauseatingly simple 'after-school special' mold of most child-friendly teleflicks" and that it "is certainly one of the better films you'll see on the channel".[10] Paul Schultz of *New York Daily News* wrote that the film "grapples with apartheid head on, yet incorporates it into an engrossing, and touching, family story." Schultz further wrote that the "changes of heart" between Mahree and the Dellums family are "most affecting" and that the "story and the human dynamics here are so inherently dramatic that the heartfelt script seems to write itself. The performances are wonderful, and when politics arise it seems natural."[11]

In June 2011, Stephan Lee of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote that the film "rocked!"[12] In 2012, *Complex* ranked the film at number 10 on the magazine's list of the 25 best Disney Channel Original Movies (DCOMs).[13] In May 2016, Aubrey Page of Collider ranked each DCOM released up to that point, placing *The Color of Friendship* at number 15. Page stated, "It's totally fair that *The Color of Friendship* is one of the most lauded installments in the Disney franchise," writing that the film features a "comparatively unflinching look at race relations" and that it "scores extra points for refusing to shy away from the more difficult sides of racism, making sure to drive home the harsh realities of racially-motivated violence."[14] That month, Ariana Bacle of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote that Disney Channel "took a risk by unapologetically making a completely necessary albeit heavy statement about prejudice with one of their kid-focused films, and it was well worth it."[15]

Awards

- 2000 Emmy Award for Outstanding Children's Program (won)[16][17]
- 2000 Humanitas Prize (won)[18]
- 2001 NAACP Image Award: Outstanding Youth or Children's Series/Special (won)[19]
- 2001 WGA Award: Children's Script Category, Paris Qualles (won)[20]
- 2001 Young Artist Awards: Best Performance in a TV Movie (Drama) - Leading Young Actress, Shadia Simmons (won)
- 2001 DGA Award: Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Children's Programs, Kevin Hooks (nominated)[21]
- 2001 Young Artist Awards: Best Family TV Movie/Pilot/Mini-Series - Cable, and Best Performance in a TV Movie (Drama) - Leading Young Actress, Lindsey Haun (nominated)

[22]

See also

- *Cry, the Beloved Country*

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